2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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on the list to another, while the list as a whole remains unchanged. Sometimes, however, the lists themselves differ; though these differences are few, they bear relevantly on the social background of the diviner and the interests current in his setting. Thus the diviners in the villages interpret shell pattern 3 as meaning, on occasion, a 'good hunt', which interpretation does not occur at all in the list of the diviners in or near Bida town, where there is no hunting. Again, in the villages shell pattern 8 is sometimes taken to mean 'a council in the house of the chief'; the connection with the 'important people' mentioned in our version is clear; but in that version, coming as it does from the capital where there are no councils of elders or chiefs, the reference to a 'council in the house of the chief' would clearly be out of place. Conversely, shell pattern 1 reversed has in Bida a meaning which hardly affects the life in villages remote from the political difficulties and tensions of the capital; characteristically, in the villages the same pattern reads 'rain will fall', a prophecy which in turn has less importance for the townspeople. In one instance at least—the transposed pattern 2 in 'house' 1—the diviner's key allows for both these interests. I need not point out especially that it allows also for modern conditions and problems of a thoroughly topical kind.

Let me finally quote two examples of complete divinations. The first was performed for a canoe-man who was about to set out on a trip up the river. The cords fell as follows:

| Cords | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shell patterns | 6 | 2 rev. | 4 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 2 rev. | 1 |
| Prophecies | The people will foregather | Refers to evening | A pleasant trip | Good trading | The women will pick quarrels | The men will be pleasant | Gifts for the chief | The *kuti* is friendly |

The advice to the client was to be of good cheer: he should start out in the evening, take along gifts for the chief, and be careful in his dealings with women; he would return, after a successful trip, in four or five days (which last prophecy was nowhere indicated in the cords). The second divination was concerned with identifying the *kuci* of a boy just born to the client (a man). Here the diviner was interested only in the first two 'houses', the first referring to 'God', the second to 'House', that is, to the client's position of a family head. After several throws the diviner obtained this combination:

| Cords | 1 | 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Shell patterns | 4 | 6 |

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whereupon he announced: 'The grandfather who begot your father—his name is that of the child.' The diviner would not explain his reasoning more precisely beyond saying that pattern 4 in 'house' 1, meaning 'many deaths', must relate to a *kuci* five 'deaths', i.e. generations, removed, while pattern 2 in 'house' 6 indicated the male sex of the *kuci*. Since the Nupe usually regard a great-grandfather as the most remote ancestor likely to be reincarnated, the diviner's reference to an additional generation would seem to be a plausible interpretation of a throw meaning 'many deaths'.

### 4. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The names of the 'houses' and the meanings attached to the various throws, even in the simple key series, clearly illustrate the close connection between divination and social life. Among the names and meanings we find represented, not only the universal problems of men and communities (death, birth, rain, illness) or particular religious notions (*Sokó*, *kuti*, performance of sacrifices), but also the mundane interests typical of Nupe society. Events on the high roads and travel and trade; the ever-present social issue of 'greatness', that is, of success in the struggle for rank and status; and the equally ubiquitous interest in matters politic, chieftainship, councils of elders, the actions of the ruling class—all these have their place in the scheme of divining and partly even in its basic vocabulary. Similarly, each relevant social grouping is explicitly referred to: the 'house', that is, the large extended family under a family head (*emi*); the 'town' or village (*eží*); the 'whole country', that is, the kingdom of Nupe; and the class of the 'great men' and nobility. As we have seen, the diverse social settings of the capital and of the villages are reflected in certain variants in the rules of divination. These affect the individual case as well; for a diviner would interpret the prophecies referring to 'gifts' or 'greatness' differently when dealing with a *talaka* (a commoner or peasant) than when dealing with a member of the aristocracy. In the former case 'gifts' mean bowls of food and 'greatness' the favours of a nobleman; in the latter case the gifts turn into more valuable presents, and 'greatness' bears on promotion in rank and title. We have seen, too, that the rules of divination are far from static, having been successfully adapted even to recent conditions and to political problems only some forty years old. We can even point to a typical, transitional phase in this process; for the choice mentioned before, of interpreting the same throw as meaning either 'rain' or 'friendly relations with the White Man', means nothing else.

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12. *Dzakó* dance

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13. Cutting of tribal marks

[p. 86 (A)]

He will consult the diviner again at the beginning of the confinement and before the child is named. The father will also buy 'medicines' to facilitate the birth and buy or collect herbs with which to prepare the new-born's first food. During the delivery itself the father keeps away, leaving the scene to his elder sister, mother or aunt, and to his father or father's brother, who is called in to cut the umbilical cord and dispose of the afterbirth (which is buried outside the hut). Even afterwards the infant's grandfather plays a more conspicuous part than does the father; while the latter goes quietly about his business, the grandfather loudly announces to all friends and visitors that a grandchild has been born to him, and it is to him that all congratulations are addressed. The delivery and the treatment of the new-born represent essentially practical procedures devoid of ceremonial. We may mention only that for four days the infant is fed on a boiled infusion of the herbs which the father has collected and given the mother's milk only on the fifth. On the same day the father sends gifts of kolanuts to all relatives and friends, with the announcement that the naming ceremony, meanwhile fixed, will take place on such-and-such a day.

This ceremony, known as *suna* ('name'), usually takes place eight days after the birth, and is traditionally preceded, on the seventh day, by a libation of beer to the ancestor thought to be re-born in the child. The ceremonial is brief and takes place in privacy, usually in the hut where the reincarnated ancestor lies buried, being attended only by the child's father and his nearest male relations. The father kneels down, a gourd with beer in his hand, and speaks this prayer (to quote a concrete instance):

'I am praying to *Sokó*. The child that has entered, Lord God, it is Landu returned (the grandfather's name). *Kuci*, hold him (the child) securely, do not permit that he falls sick. May he live, cause him to grow old'.

The ceremonial ends when beer is poured on the ground and the rest drunk in silence by the men present. As this brief ritual summarizes the whole conception of reincarnation, so it also betrays its ambiguity; for the *kuci* which is believed to have returned to the living is yet asked to take care of the living; and though one sacrifices to a particular ancestor, one yet invokes God.

The naming ceremony itself makes no further mention of these mystic notions, being concerned exclusively with formally announcing the name and identity of the new-born. This is done before a gathering of guests as large as the host can make it. The guests are relatives, friends, neighbours, and such important personages as the child's father may happen to know; they are expected to bring small gifts and will in turn be furnished with

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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food and drink. Traditionally, it is the child's grandfather who announces his name, simply and without ceremonial. But today the ceremonial has been widely remodelled in Mohammedan fashion, the announcement now falling to a mallam among the invited guests. The child's grandfather merely whispers the name to the mallam, who will then offer up prayers, in the usual mixture of crude Arabic and Hausa, and invoke divine blessing upon the new-born. It would seem that this innovation preserves the specifically religious aspect of the ceremony while shifting it from the preamble, the ancestral sacrifice (which is omitted in the strictly Mohammedan version), to the public announcement. But since a great many families still observe both the pagan sacrifice and the prayer of mallams, the religious emphasis is doubled. And this, too, seems fully warranted. For the public ceremony, at least, in the lavish style to be presently described, with singing and dancing, is itself an innovation, originating in Bida and among the wealthier classes of the capital. This festivity might well obscure the religious connotation of the naming ceremony; so that the doubling of the religious emphasis preserves the balance and hence the aspect of solemnization.

In the next and last phase of the *suna* this aspect once more disappears, giving way to purely secular interests. The infant is now brought outside, leaving the mother's hut for the first time, to be exhibited to the assembled guests. It is carried by the paternal grandmother, who also holds it when, presently, barbers will cut its hair and scratch the tribal marks on its cheeks and forehead. Traditionally, a male child's head should be shaved completely, while in the case of a girl the hair on the top of the head is left standing; this, incidentally, is the only feature in the *suna* ceremonial which varies with the sex of the child. Today, however, it is the fashion, especially in Bida, to cut the hair of boys *à la* mallam, that is, to leave a tuft of hair in the middle of the head as pious mallams do. The hair which has been shaved off is treated with some care; it is collected in a bowl and later buried inside the house, though there is no notion of evil consequences if these precautions were neglected. The facial operation is sometimes postponed for several days if the infant is too weak to stand it at once. To the observer, indeed, its cruelty seems the outstanding feature: the babe cries and squeals, and blood is running all over its face and body. The crowd, however, hardly takes notice, eating, drinking and chatting as before. The barbers perform the operation in a businesslike manner and leave as soon as they have finished, had some food, and received their fee. In wealthy households several barbers will be called in, though one man is quite sufficient for the job, and the father will try to secure the services

852 553 [305] of a famous barber-doctor. In wealthy households, too, drummers and professional musicians will be engaged to entertain the gathering and a women's dance, executed by the younger female guests, will conclude the festivities. Some of the food left over will be sent to relatives and friends who were unable to come; the father may also make gifts to the blind or the poor, or to the children of the town, if the diviners so advise him.

852 553 619 In the pagan ceremonial and in the *suna* of the poor the sumptuous feast is replaced by a modest meal of meat-and-gruel offered to friends and relations, without the added attractions of music and dancing. The shaving of the infant's head and the cutting of the tribal marks is the same in either case. We note, then, that the ceremony establishing the individual and kinship identity of the new-born also demonstrates his social identity in a wider sense, that is, the membership of tribe and sub-tribe into which the child is born and whose physical marks he will bear for life.

852 304 [619] A similar idea, though more ambiguously expressed, would seem to underlie also male circumcision. This custom is universal throughout Nupe, so that having been circumcised must be considered a mark of tribal membership. Yet circumcision is never quoted when one enumerates the things that 'make a Nupe'; indeed, one knows that other tribes do the same and that circumcision is also typical of Islam. The observance presents several [834] other puzzling features. It is called *zũ 'ba*, 'cutting the penis', which open reference to private parts is strikingly uncommon. Nor is the performance of the operation any less realistic and business- [305] like. It is once more in the hands of the barbers, especially hired and paid sixpence or a shilling for their work, and is accompanied by no ceremonial; the only rule affecting everyday family life is that the women must be out of the house on this occasion. The operation coincides neither with birth nor with puberty, that is, with an obviously important event or phase of life. It is performed at the age of eight to eleven and individually for every family, whenever the father thinks fit. The operation is, incidentally, even more repugnant to watch than the cutting of the tribal marks. The boys are terribly afraid; they have to be held down by the barber and his assistant, and severely feel the pain. Yet this shock experience seems again to serve no purpose; it is certainly not linked with any other experience that might be impressed upon the victims after or in consequence of their ordeal: they are neither segregated from the community nor made to feel that they have now passed a vital crisis and acquired some relevant qualification. Nor yet will the operation ever be referred to again. Through it, the boys have been made like other men of the tribe—that is all; but it is difficult to see why it should take place at this time of

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16. Circumcision operation

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17. A bridal procession

[p. 118 (A)]

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their lives rather than at any other, and with so little formality. The people can offer no explanation save the non-committal 'it is the custom'. It is, then, a custom whose general 'content' of aims seems clear, but whose particular 'form' appears arbitrary if not ill-chosen.

(ii) *Marriage*

Including all the various preliminaries, the wedding ceremonial is a long drawn-out affair, occupying twelve days, divided into three phases of four days. It begins when the bride puts on (or 'enters') the veil, which she will put aside only on the twelfth day, after the consummation. Even afterwards she will continue to wear the veil whenever she leaves the house or meets strangers (for another month in the villages, for three months in Bida), but may remain unveiled in the company of her husband and relations. During the first four days the bride's house is the centre of activities. The bride will bathe, stain hands and feet with henna, and don her wedding dress. Thus attired she and her family will receive visitors, and the bride's young female companions will sing and clap hands, the typical accompaniment of girls' songs and dances. The feast reaches its climax on the fourth day, when professional drummers and musicians are hired for the occasion and the bride's father offers food and drink to numerous guests.

Among them will be two envoys of the bridegroom, his brother and his best friend, who have come to accompany the bride to her future home. Among the pagans, the two men also attend the sacrifice performed by the bride's father on that day. This sacrifice (of beer and a cock) is intended for the *kuci* and is performed privately at the usual place for family sacrifices—over an ancestral grave, a twin shrine, or in front of an hereditary *cigbe*. The bride's father briefly invokes *Sokó*, asking for a prosperous marriage, blessed with children. Among Mohammedans, the religious rite involves the presence of a mallam, and every family will try to secure the offices of a famous one. The mallam, in front of all the guests, will announce the marriage, offer up prayers for bride and bridegroom, and recite the names and titles of their fathers and grandfathers as well as (having been carefully primed) the details of the brideprice and dowry. In the Mohammedan version a public ceremonial thus again replaces the private sacrifice, and secular ostentation is mingled with the religious rite. Let us note that in Mohammedan practice this solemn announcement of the marriage also establishes, formally and legally, the marriage bond, the episode being in fact referred to as *pá yawó*, 'tying the marriage'; while the pagan ceremonial replaces this precise, single act by a more circuitous procedure, of which the sacrifice to the *kuci* is the first step.

# CULTURAL FEATURES AND THE LIFE CYCLE

## Physical Characteristics: Tribal Marks: Dress

142 While the aboriginal Nupe sub-tribes (Ebe, Beni, Ebagi, and Bataci) are negro in appearance, there are indications of considerable non-negro elements in their ancestry. A striking type with oval face, high cheekbones, and slightly mongoloid eyes is often found among those of mixed Fulani descent.

181 The Nupe are known all over Nigeria as an industrious and formerly warlike people. They are progressive and anxious to try new methods, e.g., in agriculture. The women are keen and successful traders.

634 There are no facial marks common to the Nupe people as a whole, but sub-
304 tribes are distinguished to some extent. Many sub-tribes have to-day adopted "Bida" marks in addition to their own.

291 Commoners wear a loincloth, with a blue cloth thrown over the shoulder and
565 the blue phrygian cap, said to be the traditional headgear of the Nupe. Nobles and other well-to-do men wear trousers and a flowing white robe and turban.[1]

## Birth

843 The rituals surrounding childbirth begin at the time of conception and culminate in the naming ceremony. As soon as the pregnancy becomes noticeable (generally in the third to the fifth month) the parents must discontinue sexual relations and the mother must avoid places inhabited by spirits and abstain from eating certain foods which are thought to have a harmful effect on the unborn child. Special rules or avoidances may be prescribed by the diviner whom the father will consult immedi-
844 ately, and again at the beginning of the confinement and before the naming ceremony. The father keeps away during the actual birth, his elder sister, mother, or other kinswoman assisting the mother, and his father or father's brother cutting the
851 umbilical cord and disposing of the afterbirth, which is buried outside the hut. Thereafter the child's paternal grandfather plays a more important part than the father, announcing the birth of his grandchild and receiving congratulations.

553 The naming ceremony (*suna*) usually takes place eight days after the birth.
852 It is traditionally preceded, on the seventh day, by a libation of beer to the ancestor thought to be reborn in the child. The name used always to be announced by the child's grandfather before a group of relatives, without any particular ceremonial. To-day, however, with the spread of Islam, the announcement is usually made by a mallam. It is at this time also that the child's hair is cut and the tribal marks scratched on the cheeks and forehead.[2]

845 Twins are generally welcomed, but infants born with teeth are regarded as a bad omen.[3]

## Circumcision

304 Circumcision (*zuŋ'ba*) is universal, but it does not appear to be regarded as one of the more important rituals. It is performed on boys individually between the ages of 8 and 11, whenever the father thinks fit, by a barber, who is usually paid sixpence or a shilling. Women must be away from the house when it is done, otherwise there is no ceremonial.[4]

No corresponding ceremony is reported for girls.

[1] Nadel, op cit., pp. 25, 237, 362, 405–6 (sketches of tribal marks); Meek, I, 1925, pp. 28–9; Line, 1947.
[2] Nadel, 1954a, pp. 115–18.
[3] Nadel, personal communication; Malam Aliyu Bida, Ms. Notes.
[4] Nadel, op cit., p. 116.

4: Temple G-4 (no date) 1922

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They are then turned out of the house, but are allowed to live in the vicinity, and continue to receive food and protection in return for whatever work is required of them. There are dependants of both sexes, and the unambitious often prefer to spend their whole lives in this manner. Slaves were treated in much the same manner, and children born in captivity were accounted free.

Motherhood is the great desire of the women, and every New Year the Mallams proclaim which will be the best months in that year for child-bearing. They have a strong belief in a medicine-man called "Soba," who lives in the bush at Lemo, between Bida and Zungeru, and who gives medicines to produce fertility. He is seldom to be found in person, but there are guardians in the bush who act as intermediaries.

When a child is born it is nourished on water, in which the leaves of the Aduruku tree (or the bark and leaves of some seven to ten different kinds of trees, the mixture is termed "dauri") have been boiled for three to seven days. It is poured into their mouths. This continues if the mother's milk is not good, for infants are never given the milk of any animal. After seven days the child is named, and both boys and girls are called after their father and after his father, though their first name be different. They are seldom called after their mother. The aboriginal custom is somewhat different, a girl being named on the eighth, a boy on the ninth day after birth. All the relatives assemble after dawn, certain roots are placed in a pot and beer poured over them. Some is poured as a libation on the ground, the head of the family then drinks some himself, conjuring the good spirit of medicine to protect the child's life, which he designates by name. The guests then consume two pots of beer, and a feast is held with the usual dancing, drumming and singing.

Boys are circumcised by the barber at the age of six or seven, after which they commence working on the farms. When they approach the age of puberty they leave their parents' house, and build themselves a separate hut.*

The eldest child, whether boy or girl, is hated by its parents; they will not look at it, and a large percentage die of neglect. They never call it anything individual, only "boy" or "girl," and the mother would refuse to feed it but that her husband's parents come and live with her for three months to see that she fulfils that duty. Sometimes they take the baby away with them and give it to some wet-nurse, but in no case is the first-born left with its parents after it is weaned. The grandfather always takes it. It has been asserted that the mother will not suckle her first-born child because her milk is unwholesome.

* Sapke and Mokwa.